



**For immediate release
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**Contact: Wendy Fox
617-626-1453**

**PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULED ON NOMINATION
OF THREE MILE RIVER WATERSHED
AS AN AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN**

Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Ian A. Bowles has scheduled a public hearing for Wednesday, June 25, in Taunton on the nomination of the Three Mile River Watershed and headwaters of the Segreganset River as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The fourth and final public information meeting on the proposal will be held on June 12 in North Dighton to provide information prior to the hearing.

The purpose of the public hearing is to receive written and oral testimony on whether to designate the proposed Three Mile River Watershed area as an ACEC. The hearing will start at 7 p.m. in the Benjamin Friedman Middle School, 500 Norton Ave., Taunton.

“This public hearing provides an opportunity for everyone to make their feelings known about the resources and the use of such a state designation,” said Secretary Bowles. “I urge anyone interested in any aspect of the nomination to attend and provide comments.”

The Thursday, June 12, public information meeting is scheduled from 7-9 p.m. in Dighton Grange Hall, 1111 Somerset Ave. (next to Town Hall), in North Dighton. The purpose of this meeting is to inform the public about the resources and proposed boundary of the nominated area, and the goals, purpose, and effects of ACEC designation. Ample time will be provided for questions and answers.

The 14,250-acre area, which includes portions of Dighton, Norton, and Taunton, is located within the Taunton River Basin and includes a wetland and stream complex tributary to the Taunton River along with the headwaters of the Segreganset River in Taunton. On May 15, a proposal to extend the original ACEC boundary by 50 acres along the Three Mile River was submitted to Secretary Bowles by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) on behalf of the Three Mile River ACEC Planning Committee. Secretary Bowles accepted the extension proposal, which includes rare-species and fish habitats, and the extension will be subject to public review and comment along with the original proposed boundary. Secretary Bowles will make a decision on the ACEC designation within 60 days of the hearing.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston MA 02114-2119
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/dcr



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lt. Governor

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary, Executive
Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr., Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

Last February, 11 citizen nominators submitted the Three Mile River Watershed ACEC proposal to Secretary Bowles, who accepted it for full public review in April. The nominators had spent five years gathering data for the nomination and garnering support from the communities. The nomination included 24 letters of support, including seven from municipal officials.

Established in 1975 and administered by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the ACEC program currently includes 28 highly significant ecological areas covering about 241,000 acres in 73 cities and towns across the Commonwealth. The purpose of the special state designation is to preserve, restore, and enhance an area's natural and cultural resources. Proposed projects within an ACEC that need state agency action, permits, or funding are subject to stricter environmental reviews to ensure that any adverse impacts to those resources are avoided or minimized.

The designation also serves as an educational and planning tool to encourage private citizens, communities, organizations, and governmental agencies to work together as stewards of these critical resources. The designation does not supersede local jurisdiction, and does not affect the normal activities of homeowners.

Copies of the nomination and maps showing the proposed boundary can be examined at city and town halls in Dighton, Norton, and Taunton, as well as in public libraries and the SRPEDD office in Taunton. A review copy is also available at the DCR Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection, 251 Causeway Street, 7th Floor, Boston. The nomination and an interactive map also can be viewed at www.ibiblio.org/virtualcell/acec.

For more information about the ACEC program, visit www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/acec or contact ACEC Program Director Liz Sorenson at elizabeth.sorenson@state.ma.us or 617-626-1392.

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.